DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 328 JC 910 123

AUTHOR Knight, William E.
TITLE Time to Associate Degree Study: The Experience of May 1990 Graduates of the Kent State University Regional Campuses.
INSTITUTION Kent State Univ., OH. Regional Campuses. Office of Academic Assessment and Evaluation Services.
PUB DATE Oct 90
NOTE 28p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Persistence; *Associate Degrees; *Attendance Patterns; College Graduates; Community Colleges; Educational Attainment; *Enrollment Trends; Graduation Requirements; Higher Education; Stopouts; *Student Characteristics; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS Kent State University OH Regional Campuses

ABSTRACT

In order to determine the length of time taken by graduates of Kent State University's Regional Campuses (RC) to obtain an Associate Degree, master records were analyzed for 91% (N=527) of the students who graduated in May 1990. The study considered the relationship between time to associate degree and such factors as campus attended, major, semester hours accumulated, gender, ethnicity, age, and grade point average (GPA). Complete information was not available for 67% of the graduates concerning the number of semesters they "stopped out," though available information suggested that one half of the graduates stop out at some point and that the average stop out period was two semesters. Other study findings included the following: (1) the May 1990 graduates were 96% Caucasian, 68% female, and an average of 31 years old; (2) the graduates had accumulated an average of 82 semester credit hours and earned an average GPA of 3.01; (3) the largest percentage of graduates received their degrees in 3 years, while the graduates averaged 6 years from admission to graduation; (4) the number of semesters to degree ranged from 5 semesters for Physical Therapy Assisting Technology graduates to 22 semesters for Systems/Industrial Engineering Technology graduates and 30 semesters for Banking and Finance Technology graduates; and (5) there was little difference in semesters to degree by gender, but older students and students with low GPA's tended to take longer to obtain their degrees. (GFW)

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TIME TO ASSOCIATE DEGREE STUDY

The Experience of May 1990 Graduates of the Kent State University Regional Campuses

Kent State University Regional Campuses
Office of Academic Assessment and Evaluation Services

October 1990

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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ABSTRACT

TITLE: TIME TO ASSOCIATE DEGREE STUDY: THE EXPERIENCE OF MAY, 1990 GRADUATES OF THE KENT STATE UNIVERSITY REGIONAL CAMPUSES

AUTHOR: William E. Knight, Coordinator, Academic Assessment and Evaluation Services, Regional Campuses

SUBJECT: A Study of Factors Associated with the Length of Time to Obtaining an Associate Degree for May 1990 Regional Campuses Graduates

DATE: October, 1990

SOURCE OF COPIES: Kent State University Regional Campuses
Lincoln Building, Kent, Ohio 44242
(216) 672-2330

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Administrative Dean, Regional Campuses
Director of Technical Programs
Coordinator of Admissions and Records
Regional Campus Deans
Regional Campus Directors of Student Affairs

NUMBER OF PAGES: 21

SUMMARY: This study was undertaken to describe the length of time taken by Regional Campuses graduates to obtain an Associate Degree and to focus on such related factors as campus attended, major, semester hours accumulated, gender, ethnicity, age, and grade point average. Its results may assist in understanding how much time is taken by students to obtain an Associate Degree and may be beneficial to institutional planning and student services.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This study was undertaken to describe the length of time taken by Regional Campus graduates to obtain an Associate Degree. The student master records of 527 or 91% of the May 1990 Regional Campus graduates were analyzed. Complete information was not available for the other 9% of the graduates, nor was complete information available for 67% of the graduates concerning the number of semesters they "stopped out" on the way to their degrees. The information which was available on this topic suggested that one half of the graduates stop out at some time and that the average stop out period was 2 semesters.

Profile of May 1990 Regional Campus Graduates

The profile of May 1990 Regional Campus graduates showed that 96% were caucasian, 68% were female, and the average graduate had accumulated 82 semester credit hours at the time of graduation. Their average age was 31 years and their average grade point average was 3.01.

Average Time From Admission to Graduation

The largest percentage (the mode) of graduates received their degrees in three years and the graduates averaged (the mean) 6 years from admission to graduation. This is equivalent to a mode of 6 semesters and a mean of 12 semesters.

Factors Related to Time To Degree

The number of semesters to degree did not vary greatly by campus, but varied considerably by students' majors. Students in all majors on average obtained more than the required number of semester credit hours for their respective programs and this margin varied by students' majors.

There was little difference in semesters to degree by gender, but considerable difference by ethnicity. Older students and students with lower grade point averages tended to take longer to obtain their degrees.

Conclusions

Students may be taking more time than expected to obtain their Associate Degrees due to part-time enrollment, stopping out, enrolling in developmental education coursework, enrolling in courses that do not apply toward their majors, and failing courses. Kent RC students may be taking similar to somewhat longer time to obtain their Associate Degrees than students from other two year colleges, where students average 3 to 5.9 years to degree.

The major conclusion of the study is that very few Regional Campus students obtain an Associate Degree in two years. Students, faculty, and staff should understand this fact to improve institutional planning and student services. Further studies may be needed to determine how students' time to degree can be shortened and whether this would be a beneficial outcome for the Regional Campuses.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Kent State University Regional Campuses are a group of seven community-oriented institutions serving the educational needs of northeastern Ohio through the provision of Associate Degree programs, baccalaureate-parallel coursework, and developmental and continuing education. Approximately 8,000 students are enrolled in the Regional Campuses. Two-thirds are female and the average age of students is 27. Some 500 to 600 students receive Associate Degrees each year, 25% to 30% of them in baccalaureate transfer programs and 70% to 75% in technical programs.

Regional Campus students differ from traditional college students in many ways. All are commuter students, the majority are enrolled part-time, and most combine college with occupational and family responsibilities. They are older and often less academically prepared than their fellow students at the Kent Campus. Regional Campus students also exhibit complex enrollment patterns. Students who graduate often stop-out for extended periods and devote considerably more time than two years towards an Associate Degree. This study documents aspects of their enrollment behavior to discover how long it took the Regional Campuses' most recent graduates to obtain their Associate Degrees.

Study Methodology

This study is based upon 527 student master records of May 1990 Regional Campus graduates prepared by the Office of Resource Analysis and Planning. These students represent 91% of all Regional Campus May graduates; complete information was not available for analysis for the remaining 9%. Each record included the admission date, gender, ethnicity, total credit hours completed, major, age, cumulative grade point average, and campus for each graduate at the time of graduation.

Information concerning the number of semesters of "stopping out" (not attending but later returning) was available for 33% of the graduates. For this group, one half of the May 1990 graduates "stopped out" at some time. The average stop out period was 2 semesters (not necessarily consecutive) and this did not vary significantly by campus attended or by program. Stop out data was not available for the remaining 67% of the graduates.

Profile of May 1990 Regional Campus Graduates

This information led to a profile of the May 1990 graduates showing that the largest proportion graduate in 3 years and that the mean number of years from admission to graduation was 6. Additionally, 96% of the graduates were caucasian and two-thirds were female. Graduates averaged 82 semester credit hours completed at graduation. The average age of graduates was 31 years and age ranged from 17 to 70. The cumulative grade point average of graduates averaged 3.01 and ranged from 2.00 to 4.00. This profile is presented in detail in **Table 1**.

II. STUDY RESULTS

A. Time to Degree in Years

The largest proportion of graduates received their degrees 3 years after admission. The mean number of years from admission to graduation for all students in the study was 6. The number of years to degree ranged from 1 for a transfer student to 30. 13% of the students graduated within 2 years, 43% graduated within 3 years, 61% graduated within 4 years, and 72% graduated within 5 years. This information is presented in **Table 2 and Figure 1**.

B. Time to Degree in Semesters

Because actual student enrollment periods are semesters instead of years, the above information was converted to semesters, which shall be the enrollment duration unit used for the remainder of this study. Converting the information given above to semesters and not including summers, the largest percentage of students graduated after 6 semesters and the mean number of semesters from admission to graduation was 12. The number of semesters to degree ranged from 2 to 60. 13% of the students graduated within 4 semesters. 43% graduated within six semesters, 61% graduated within 8 semesters, and 72% graduated within 10 semesters. This information is presented in **Table 3 and Figure 2.**

C. Semesters to Degree by Campus

The number of semesters to degree did not vary widely by campus; the average number of semesters from admission to graduation ranged from 10 at East Liverpool to 13 at Stark with students from the other campuses averaging 11 or 12 semesters. This information is presented in **Table 4.**

D. Semesters to Degree by Major

The number of semesters to degree did vary considerably by major; the average number of semesters from admission to graduation ranged from 5 for Physical Therapy Assisting Technology to 22 for Systems/Industrial Engineering Technology and 30 for Banking and Finance Technology. Small numbers of graduates from these later two programs and the newness of the BFRT major should preclude strong inferences based on this information. The average number of semesters for students obtaining an AA, or AS degree was 12. This information is presented in **Table 5.**

E. Hours to Degree by Major

The number of semester credit hours students had completed at the time of graduation was compared by major. The average number of credit hours for all graduates was 82. The average number of credit hours in technical programs ranged from 76 in Office Management Technology to 94 in Automotive Technology. The average number of credit hours obtained by AA or AS graduates was 81. This information is presented in **Table 6.**

F. Hours to Degree by Major vs. Minimum Required Hours to Degree

The number of semester credit hours students had completed at the time of graduation was compared with the minimum number of credit hours required for graduation by major. All graduates obtained more than the minimum number of credit hours necessary for graduation in their respective majors on average. At the low range, Office Management Technology and Physical Therapy Assisting Technology graduates averaged 9 more credit hours than the minimum necessary for graduation. At the high range, Automotive Technology and Banking and Finance Technology graduates averaged 25 to 26 more credit hours than the minimum necessary for graduation. AA, and AS graduates, who are required to obtain a minimum of 65 credit hours at graduation, averaged 81 credit hours at graduation. This information is presented in **Table 7.**

G. Semesters to Degree by Gender

There was no significant difference in the number of semesters from admission to graduation by gender of the graduates; females averaged 11 semesters and males averaged 12 semesters. This information is presented in **Table 8.**

H. Semesters to Degree by Ethnicity

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure permits the conclusion that, despite the low numbers of minority graduates in the study, a significant difference existed by graduate ethnicity for number of semesters from admission to graduation. Asian (n=2) and native american (n=1) graduates averaged 4 semesters to degree, while caucasian (n=511) graduates averaged 11 semesters and hispanic (n=3) and african american (n=11) graduates averaged 13 and 15 semesters, respectively. This information is presented in **Table 9.**

I. Semesters to Degree by Age

May 1990 Regional Campus graduates ranged from age 17 to 70 with 31 as the average age with most (57%) students age 30 or younger. A low positive correlation (0.35) was found between semesters to degree and age, suggesting that, to some extent, time to degree tended to increase with age. This information is presented in **Table 10**.

J. Semesters to Degree by GPA

The cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) of graduates ranged from 2.00 to 4.00 with average GPA at 3.01 and most graduates between 2.51 and 3.50 GPA. There was a very slight (-0.05) negative correlation between semesters to degree and GPA, indicating that, to a very small extent, time to degree tended to decrease with increased GPA. This information is presented in **Table 11**.

Table 1
Summary Characteristics of the May 1900
Regional Campus Graduates

Number of Graduates: (This represents a 91% sample of the total 579 graduates.)	529	
Campus:		
Ashtabula	78	(15%)
East Liverpool	75	(14%)
Geauga	16	(3%)
Salem	65	(12%)
Stark	70	(13%)
Trumbull	111	(21%)
Tuscarawas	114	(22%)
Major:		
AA or AS Degree	164	(31%)
Accounting Technology (ACTT)	39	(7%)
Automotive Engineering Technology (AUTT)	2	(<1%)
Banking and Finance Technology (BFRT)	1	(<1%)
Business Management Technology (BMRT)	71	(13%)
Criminal Justice Studies--two year (CJST)	10	(2%)
Computer Technology (COMT)	22	(4%)
Electrical/Electronic Engineering Technology (EERT)	32	(6%)
Human Services Technology (HST)	21	(4%)
Systems (Industrial) Engineering Technology (IERT)	4	(<1%)
Mechanical Engineering (Integrated Manufacturing) Technology (MERT)	18	(3%)
Nursing--two year (NRST)	78	(15%)
Office Technology (OMRT)	31	(6%)
Physical Therapy Assistant Technology (PTAT)	14	(3%)
Radiologic Technology (RADT)	22	(4%)
Gender:		
Female	357	(68%)
Male	172	(32%)
Ethnicity:		
African American	11	(2%)
Asian	2	(<1%)
Caucasian	511	(96%)
Hispanic	3	(<1%)
Native American	1	(<1%)

Table 1 (cont.)
Summary Characteristics of May 1990
Regional Campus Graduates

Age at Graduation:		
17-25	195	(37%)
26-30	89	(17%)
31-35	84	(16%)
36-40	72	(14%)
41-45	46	(8%)
46-50	26	(4%)
51-55	10	(2%)
56-60	3	(1%)
61-65	0	(0%)
65-70	1	(1%)
Cumulative Grade Point Average:		
3.51-4.00	99	(19%)
3.01-3.00	170	(32%)
2.51-3.00	170	(32%)
2.00-2.50	89	(17%)

Table 2
Time to Degree in Years

Years	N	%	Cum. %
1	1	< 1%	< 1%
2	66	13%	13%
3	159	30%	43%
4	97	18%	61%
5	49	9%	70%
6	10	2%	72%
7	21	4%	76%
8	14	3%	79%
9	12	2%	81%
10	17	3%	84%
11	13	3%	87%
12	23	4%	91%
More Than 12	47	9%	100%

Table 3
Time to Degree in Semesters

Semesters	N	%	Cum. %
2	1	< 1%	
3	12	2%	2%
4	54	10%	12%
5	25	5%	17%
6	134	25%	42%
7	23	4%	46%
8	75	14%	60%
9	15	3%	63%
10	34	6%	69%
11	9	2%	71%
12	1	< 1%	72%
13	6	1%	73%
14	15	3%	76%
15	2	< 1%	77%
16	12	2%	79%
17	3	< 1%	79%
18	9	2%	81%
19	5	1%	82%
20	12	2%	84%
21	2	< 1%	85%
22	11	2%	87%
23	0	0%	87%
24	23	4%	91%
More Than 24	47	9%	100%

Table 4
Average Semesters to Degree by Campus

Ashtabula	11
East Liverpool	10
Geauga	11
Salem	12
Stark	13
Trumbull	11
Tuscarawas	12

Table 5
Average Semesters to Degree by Major

AA or AS Degrees	12
ACTT	12
AUTT	7
BFRT	30
BMRT	12
CJST	15
COMT	12
EERT	10
HST	12
IERT	22
MERT	14
NRST	11
OMRT	9
PTAT	5
RADT	11

Table 6
Average Semester Credit Hours to Degree by Major

AA or AS Degrees	81
ACTT	78
AUTT	94
BFRT	93
BMRT	79
CJST	84
COMT	82
EERT	85
HST	86
IERT	93
MERT	96
NRST	84
OMRT	76
PTAT	79
RADT	85

Table 7
Average Semester Credit Hours to Degree vs. Minimum Credit Hours to Degree Required by Major

Major	Average Hours to Degree Obtained	Minimum Hours to Degree Required
AA or AS	81	65
ACTT	78	66
AUTT	94	69
BFRT	93	67
BMRT	79	65
CJST	84	65
COMT	82	66
EERT	85	70
HST	86	65
IERT	93	70
MERT	96	72
NRST	84	70
OMRT	76	66-67
PTAT	79	70
RADT	85	72

Table 8
Average Semesters to Degree by Gender

Female	11
Male	12

Table 9
Average Semesters to Degree by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	N	Semesters to Degree
African-American	15	15
Asian	2	4
Caucasian	511	11
Hispanic	3	13
Native American	1	4

ANOVA TABLE

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	
Between Groups	958	4	239.5	2.63	$p < .05$	$(.90F = 1.96)$
Within Groups	47706	523	91.2			

Table 10
Average Semesters to Degree by Age

Age Group	N	Semesters to Degree
17-25	195	7
26-30	89	11
31-35	84	13
36-40	72	19
41-45	46	14
46-50	26	14
51-55	10	13
56-60	3	11
61-65	0	
65-70	1	22

$r = 0.34$
$t = 9.70$
$df = 527$
$p < .001$

Table 11
Average Semesters to Degree by Cumulative Grade Point Average

GPA RANGE	N	Semesters to Degree
3.51-4.00	99	9
3.01-3.50	170	12
2.51-3.00	170	12
2.00-2.50	89	10

r=-0.05
t=-1.10
df=527
p>.05

FIGURE 1
TIME TO DEGREE IN YEARS

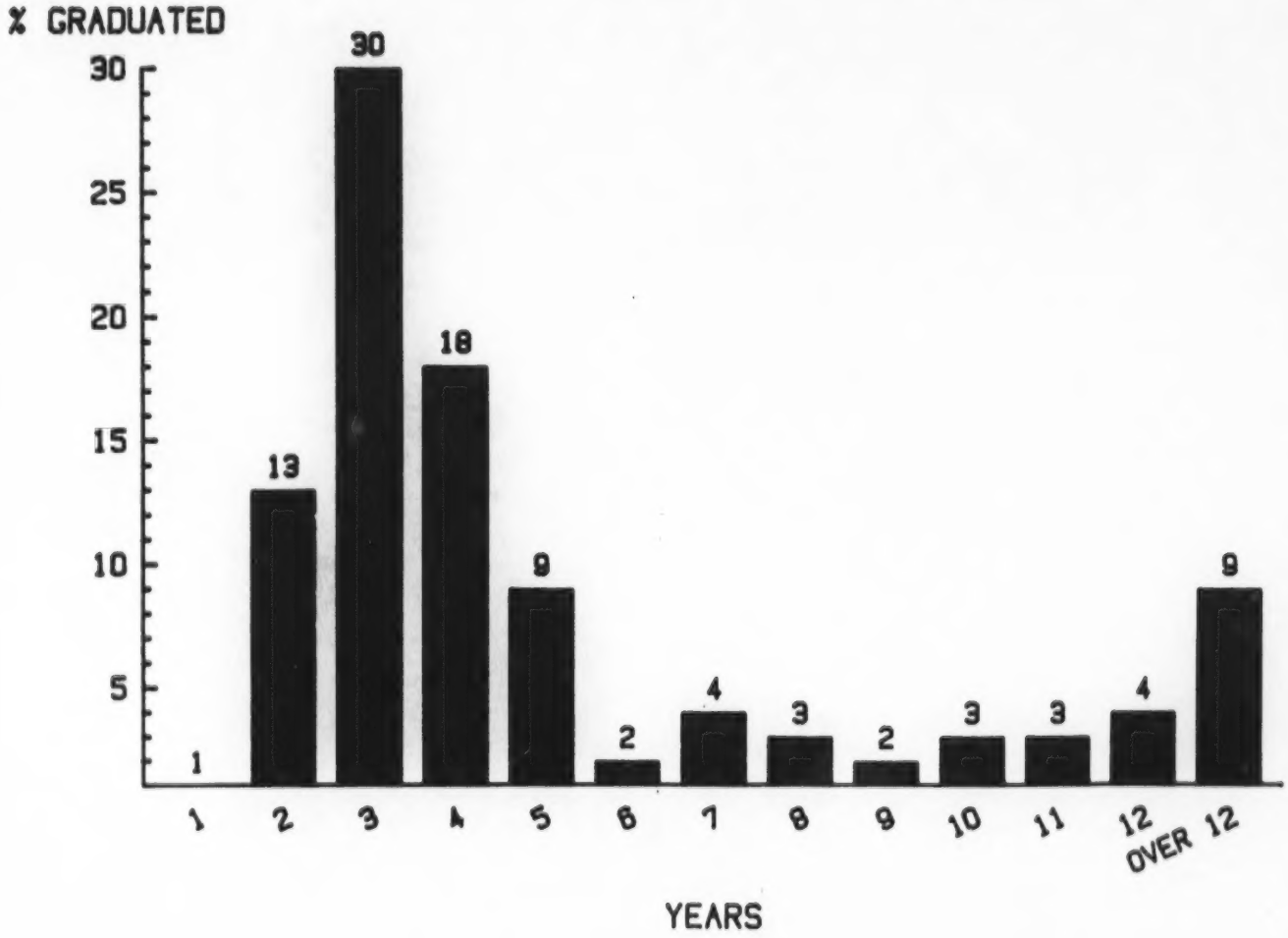
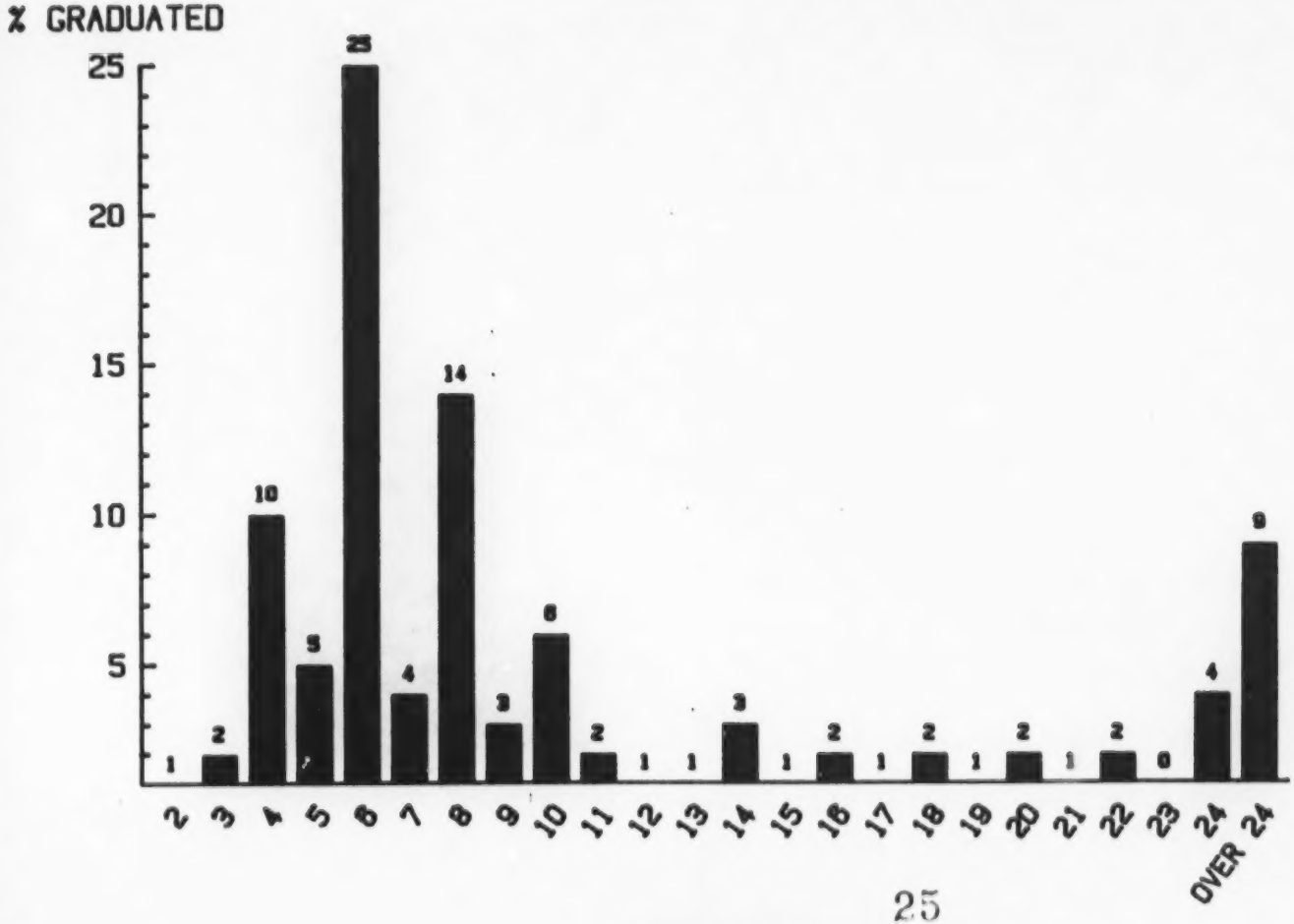


FIGURE 2
TIME TO DEGREE IN SEMESTERS



III. Conclusions

Why did it take Regional Campus graduates on average six years to get a degree?

Several factors may be suggested which help to explain why the time to Associate Degree for nearly all Regional Campus graduates is beyond two years. Several of these factors were suggested by an April 1990 similar study performed by the City Colleges of Chicago.

Factors include: "stopping out," part-time enrollment, enrollment for more than 12 credit hours per semester (the University's definition of full-time enrollment), but less than the 16 or 17 credit hours per semester which would be required for students to complete most Associate Degree programs in 4 semesters, extra hours for developmental coursework, credit hours earned which do not apply toward an Associate Degree, and credit hours attempted, but not earned.

Analysis of how each of these factors contributed to the time to degree for the May 1990 Regional Campus graduates is beyond the scope of this study, although the electronic transcript/degree audit system will allow for such an analysis at a future time.

How does the time to degree for Regional Campus graduates compare to graduates of other institutions?

The (1990) City College of Chicago study, which inspired this effort, reported that Associate Degree graduates averaged 5.9 years from admission to degree (compared to 6 years for Regional Campus graduates), that time to degree ranged from 2 to 38 years, and that only 4% of graduates received their degree 2 or less years after admission (13% for Regional Campus graduates), while 22% had obtained their degree after 3 years (43% for Regional Campus graduates).

A 1982 Community College of Philadelphia study determined that their graduates were enrolled for an average of 3.5 years. Only 3% of the students in this study received their degree after 2 years.

A study of June, 1989 Associate Degree graduates of the City University of New York system showed average time to degree as 3 years with 19% of students obtaining a degree in 2 years.

A national study conducted by the U. S. Department of Education, referenced in the City Colleges of Chicago study, which examined higher education enrollment patterns of 1972 through 1984 high school graduates, revealed that the average time to degree for Associate Degree graduates was 4.5 years. A 1989 study by ACT indicated that 37.6% of graduates of open admissions public two-year colleges received their degree after three years (compared to 43% of Regional Campus graduates in this study).

What are the conclusions of this study?

1. **For most students, the Regional Campuses do not function as two-year institutions.** They have evolved into flexible educational service providers that serve many different educational needs and offer many paths to an Associate Degree. Two year attendance followed by graduation is the exception, not the rule. Many if not most students "stop out" at least once, are enrolled on a part-time basis, lengthen their time to degree by enrollment in developmental coursework, and may enroll in courses which do not apply to graduation.

2. **The Regional Campuses should make current and potential students, faculty, and student affairs staff aware of the changing nature of Associate Degree programs in two-year colleges.** Two-year attendance followed by graduation may no longer be, if indeed it ever was, a useful or realistic standard of "success." Two-year, three-year, and even longer graduation rates may not be appropriate performance measures. Academic advising, developmental education, financial aid, and other academic and administrative policies and procedures should be reviewed for consistency with observed student enrollment behaviors.

3. Finally, this study describes students' enrollment patterns prior to graduation. **It does not examine the reasons underlying their behavior.** To increase graduation rates, job placement, and transfer to four-year institutions, the economic, social, and academic factors that affect enrollment patterns and success rates need to be determined. Further studies at the campus and program levels would be necessary to determine how and if the time to degree could be shortened and if this would necessarily be a beneficial outcome for the Regional Campuses and their students.

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